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Ministerial round table: investing in gender equality and the empowerment of women

Chair's summary

1. On 10 March 2015, the Commission on the Status of Women held a ministerial round table on the topic "Investing in gender equality and the empowerment of women" under the overall theme "Priorities for future action to realize gender equality, the empowerment of women and the human rights of women and girls". The participants in the round table focused on current challenges and the way forward in financing for gender equality to accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

2. The round table was chaired by the Deputy Foreign Minister of Estonia, Marina Kaljurand, and was moderated by the Special Adviser on Post-2015 Development Planning, Amina Mohammed. In total, 25 ministers and high-level officials participated in the round table.

Strategies to increase investments in gender equality

3. All participants confirmed the importance of investing in gender equality and women's empowerment. Many expressed concern about remaining gaps in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, and all called for increased financing and investment for gender equality to ensure a full and effective implementation. Participants highlighted the particular significance of increasing investments in gender equality in the context of the post-2015 development agenda.

4. Participants stressed the significance of domestic resource mobilization for the adequate and effective allocation of those resources towards gender equality. Mainstreaming and institutionalizing gender equality in government planning and budgeting processes were considered an urgent priority. Many participants reported

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that gender-responsive budgeting was an effective strategy that had resulted in increased financing to implement gender equality commitments. Participants emphasized the important role of the ministries of finance and of planning in achieving such gains. Strategies to strengthen gender-responsive budgeting at both the national and local levels included the regular analysis of gender issues in budgets at all levels, the audit of budget expenditures and the assessment of the impact of public spending on gender equality. Participants also highlighted the importance of progressive tax measures that did not discriminate against women. According to participants, further efforts were required to strengthen the technical capacity of governmental institutions to draw up gender-responsive budgets. Stronger collaboration was needed across governmental departments responsible for gender equality, planning and financing to enable the effective planning, budgeting and implementation of gender equality policies.

5. Several participants drew attention to the need to strengthen the monitoring of public spending, for instance through open budgets and budget audits, gender analyses and the assessment of policy impact. They highlighted the need for increased resources, coordination and capacity-building for the collection, dissemination and use of sex-disaggregated data. They recommended that a central body collect data in accordance with global gender indicators. An example of the role that civil society could play in monitoring and providing oversight of government programmes was provided. Participants encouraged the sharing of good practices to facilitate the scaling-up of programmes and initiatives from the local to the national levels, as well as among countries.

6. Participants emphasized the importance of development cooperation to support countries in meeting gender equality commitments, through North-South cooperation, in particular official development assistance. They believed that, while there had been a positive trend in the total volume of donor aid commitments targeting gender equality and women's empowerment, there remained significant funding gaps in critical areas of importance to women and girls, notably in their economic empowerment and in ending violence against women. To ensure that funding addressed those gaps, participants called for strengthened capacity-building, technical assistance and comprehensive systems to monitor the total amount of official development assistance allocated to gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as the funding allocation in key sectors. In that regard, there was a call for greater support to developing countries by the United Nations system, including the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). Participants stressed that all donor support should be aligned with national development priorities, plans and strategies, emphasizing the accountability of donors. Speakers acknowledged the emerging role of South-South and triangular cooperation in facilitating the sharing of experiences and good practices.

7. Participants also drew attention to the role of the private sector in supporting investments for gender equality, including in partnership with the public sector. Some participants noted the need for the private sector to be fully aligned with national priorities on gender equality and emphasized the importance for private actors to adhere to the principles of transparency and accountability for gender equality. Participants highlighted the role of civil society organizations as advocates and in service delivery and stated that their participation in key decision-making processes should be strengthened.

An enabling policy and legislative environment

8. The development and full implementation of gender equality policies and strategies to address persistent gaps were identified as a priority. Participants stated that such frameworks were instrumental in articulating gender equality priorities at the national level, linking them with policy and planning, and monitoring and accountability mechanisms, and that their implementation needed to be fully funded. National machineries for gender equality were considered particularly important, with several participants underlining the need for clear mandates, adequate resources and strengthened capacity to deliver results. Participants acknowledged the need for other governmental agencies, including line ministries, to work in close collaboration with national machineries to pursue gender equality. Participants also highlighted the need for better alignment between gender equality policies and national development strategies.

9. Several participants mentioned that, in many countries, discriminatory or inadequate legislation was a major obstacle for overcoming gender inequality. A number of good practices were shared that included reforms in tax systems, changes in budgetary laws, increased quotas for women's participation, mandatory budget allocations and favourable amendments to constitutions and family laws.

Priority actions for the future

10. Several priority actions were identified for accelerating the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the area of financing for gender equality. All participants agreed that Governments required increased resources for closing the gap between commitments and implementation. Ministers noted that resources should be focused on achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women, but that a particular emphasis should be put on women-headed households, women in conflict situations and rural women.

11. Opportunities for raising resources included government action through progressive tax policies and the efficient allocation of those resources to priority actions for ensuring gender equality, such as the provision of basic public services and social protection. Ministers identified the need to increase the capacity to develop and implement gender-responsive plans and budgets that yielded such results for women and girls. Similarly, strengthening mechanisms to monitor public spending and programme impact, including through the collection and use of sex-disaggregated data, was identified as a priority area.

12. Participants emphasized the need for donors to meet their official development assistance commitments and to ensure that aid allocations targeted critical gap areas and were aligned with national development priorities, plans and strategies. Information on aid allocations to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women should be made available and accessible. Participants underlined that donors and United Nations agencies should continue to provide technical support to countries for the institutionalization of gender-sensitive policies, plans and budgets. Looking ahead to the post-2015 development framework, participants called on all actors to work together to address gender inequality, including by building multi-stakeholder partnerships.